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## Eu(rope)

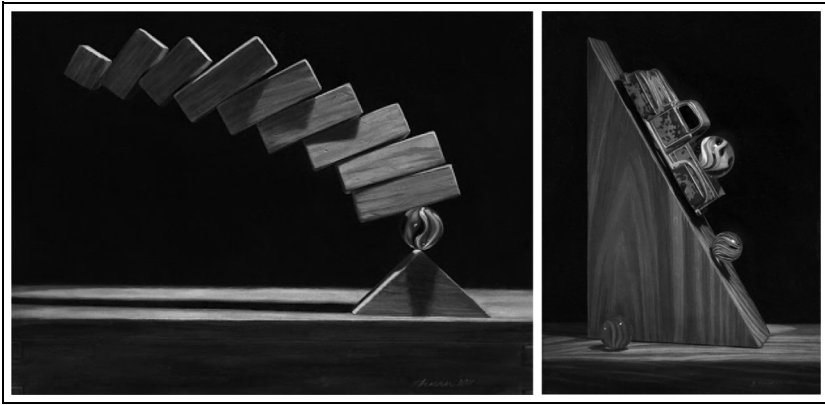
### (Re)assembling, (Re)casting, and (Re)aligning Lines of De- and Re-territorialisation of Early Childhood

Liz Jones, Jayne Osgood, Mathias Urban, Rachel Holmes, and Maggie MacLure

**Abstract** The aim of this paper is to (re)(e)value(ate) current micro- and macropolicies and politics that shape – and are shaped by – conceptualisations of and, in consequence, practices towards young children in a range of institutions/figurations. The ‘geopolitical’ location for our investigation is Europe, understood as conceptual space(s) as well as (geographical) territory. Whilst we begin by focusing attention on events within an English context, we nevertheless move beyond geographical boundaries. We argue that movements that are currently being undertaken in England are not individual activities. Rather, England is infected and affected by European and global histories, practices, policies, philosophies and epistemologies. We argue that it is the oscillations between different components within a broad European assemblage (human and nonhuman) that makes something happen. Subsequently, we detail and question whether ‘happenings’ that are occurring in England can be considered as possible creative openings where early childhood education/care could be reassembled ‘differently’.

**Keywords:** *assemblage, curriculum, policy analysis, Deleuze, rhizomatic*

Once one steps outside what’s been thought before . . . once one ventures outside what’s familiar and reassuring, once one has to invent new concepts for unknown lands, then methods and moral systems break down and thinking becomes, as Foucault puts it, a “perilous act”, a violence, whose first victim is oneself. (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 103–104)



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## Introduction

A pivotal aim of this assemblage is to (re)(e)value(ate) current micro- and macro-policies and politics (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) that shape – and are shaped by – conceptualisations of and, in consequence, practices towards young children in a range of locations, institutions, and figurations (Elias, 1982). The ‘geopolitical’ location for our investigation is Europe, understood as conceptual space(s) as well as (geographical) territory. Our genealogical (re)turn within this ‘knowledge space’ or ‘knowledge assemblage’ (Turnbull, 2000) can be understood as ‘a dialectical [process] in which forms of social space are co-produced’ (Turnbull, 2000, p. 37). So, whilst we begin by focusing attention on events within an English context, we nevertheless make forays beyond geographical boundaries. We argue that movements that are currently being undertaken in England are not individual, peculiar activities carried out in splendid isolation. Rather, England is infected and affected by European and global histories, practices, policies, philosophies, and epistemologies. These, we argue, shoot across borders and boundaries in what could be understood as a succession or chain of rhizomatic movements. It is the oscillations between different components within a broad European assemblage (human and nonhuman) that makes something happen. Subsequently, we detail a number of ‘happenings’ that are occurring in England. We do so with a view to asking whether these events are possible creative openings where early childhood education and care could be re-assembled ‘differently’.

## (Re)assembling

As Jane Bennett (2010) notes, ‘Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts’ (p. 23). She notes that whilst assemblages are ‘living, throbbing confederations’ (p. 23), they are able to function ‘despite the persistent presence of energies that confound from within’ (p. 23–24). The act of assembling ourselves in order to write this paper is testimony to such confusing and baffling ‘energies’, and whilst we don’t want to labour this point, it is nevertheless important to foreground that embracing Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004) concept means becoming part of the assemblage ourselves. The following quote captures the task in hand:

Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in their ability to make something happen. . . . Each member and proto-member of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an *agency of the assemblage*. (Bennett, 2010, p. 24)



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Whilst it will become evident that we (i.e. four individuals, three different universities, north and south geographical divide, etc.) are driven by something that could be described as ‘vital force’, we nevertheless have to negotiate all the frustrations and unwieldiness that is an inevitable component of becoming an assemblage. Thus this paper avoids unfolding in a smooth, seamless way. Instead, it flits between policy analysis as well as more personal musings. We want to examine recent events that relate to early childhood education and care within England and Europe as well as

reference stuff that is happening to us on a more individual basis, and in so doing we are attempting to follow and incorporate what Bennett (2010) refers to as a theory of distributive agency (p. 21). Distributive agency draws us away from more familiar theories of action that are predicated on the intentional subject. We are therefore curious as to whether an agentic assemblage will help us to rethink what ‘becoming (a) child’ means in the 21st century?

As noted, a central aim of this assemblage is to evaluate what is going on within the field of early years education both at the micro and macro level in order to create the necessary conceptual space where we can ask questions that currently elude us. In England, there is an interesting dissonance that has erupted where on the one hand there are government conceptualizations of early childhood education that are heavily inscribed within neoliberal discourses – encapsulated and embodied within the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (revised in 2012) – whilst on the other there are local movements that seek to challenge both the dominant discourse of neoliberalism as well as curriculum directives. Jayne Osgood finds herself embroiled and enmeshed within one such local movement, Early Childhood Action (ECA), an alliance of concerned academics, activists, practitioners, and commentators. It was rapidly assembled to offer a policy critique of the revised Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (EYFSC), a curriculum that offers a linear stages and ages account of learning and which places significance on the acquisition of early literacy and numeracy skills. These are understood within policy terms as the foundation for and an assurance of better academic results amongst the European community and further afield.

Often, the polarisation of positions encourages narratives that are predicated on binary logic where our own position becomes a matter of taking sides. However, as a way of warding off this tendency we see all of these positions as being lines that manifest within the assemblage. As Deleuze notes:

Just as in painting, assemblages are a bunch of lines. But there are all kinds of lines. Some lines are segments, or segmented; some lines get caught in a rut, or disappear into “black holes”; some are destructive, sketching death; and some lines are vital and creative. These creative and vital lines open up an assemblage, rather than close it down. The idea of an “abstract” line is particularly complex. A line may very well represent nothing at all, be purely geometrical, but it is not yet abstract as long as it traces an outline. An abstract line is a line with no outlines, a line that passes **between** things, a line in mutation. (as cited in Bryant, 2009)

Below we try to articulate what some of the effects and affects are when ‘all kinds of lines’, including ‘vital’, ‘creative’, and ‘destructive’, enter into composition with ‘states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodes . . . utterances, modes of expression, and a whole regime of signs’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 12). We question whether by plugging into an assemblage we can make available the ‘non-thought within thought’ (p. 12), which seems to us to be particularly imperative in early years education where overly familiar and habitual notions of who the child is blocks possibilities for *becoming child* outside of normative scripts. We ask: Can we understand the assemblage as an ‘event-thought, a haecceity, instead of a subject-thought, a problem-thought instead of an essence-thought or theorem; a thought that appeals to people instead of taking itself for a government ministry’ (p. 417)? Can we move from what Deleuze and Guattari (2004) describe as ‘the classical image of thought, and the striating of mental space it effects, [which] aspires to universality’ (p. 417)?

### Re-casting: Not Sides, but Taking a Stand . . .

Yet, whilst wanting to ward off some of the consequences of situating ourselves within an arid binary, we nevertheless might ask whether the conscious act of ‘taking sides’ is not an ethical and political necessity in researching an array as complex and contradictory as the ‘education’ of young children – an array of shifting local and global practices, policies, values, positions, aspirations, and manifest interests? Shouldn’t we insist on pointing at the transformative power of the ‘desiring machine’ of early childhood education? The lines of the assemblage could then be interrogated for their machinic properties that not only ‘imply’, as Paulo Freire (2004) argues in *Pedagogy of Hope* (p. 23), but actually *work* the transformation of the world. Resisting the temptation of polarization and binary logic is tricky but necessary, we argue. It leaves us researchers in the critical childhood policy studies collaborative and parts of the assemblage with the challenge of taking a stand (rather than a ‘side’) in this array.

Becoming an assemblage, then, is an act of positioning and repositioning in relation to each other and even more so in relation to the ‘desiring machine’ that is early childhood education in times of neoliberalism. In undertaking this exercise, it will be important to point out that what we set out to critique is the discourse as much as the practices of neoliberalism which, while not necessarily coherent and quite often contradictory, nevertheless work to universalise the marketisation and commodification of all aspects of life on a scale that comprises the individual and the social, the local and the global. Stephen Ball (2012), in his recent book subtitled *New*

*Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary*, outlines a possible vantage point for our critique as he argues for a view of neoliberalism that

recognises both the material and the social relations involved, that is both the neo-Marxist focus on 'economisation' of social life and the 'creation' of new opportunities for profit, what Ong (2007) calls neo-liberalism with a big 'N', and a Foucauldian analytics of governmentality, and particularly the governing of populations through the production of 'willing', 'self-governing', entrepreneurial selves, what Ong calls neo-liberalism with a small 'n' – which is re-configuring relationships between governing and the governed, power and knowledge, and sovereignty and territoriality [p. 4]. (Ball, 2012, p. 3)

An assemblage itself, early childhood is a line (a set of lines) within a wider assemblage which needs to come into our awareness for our intended act of positioning – ourselves, as well as the lines of the assemblage and our relation to them. Introducing relationality into our analysis, we hint at the 'spatialised' characteristic of the early childhood assemblage, a concept we borrow from Turnbull (2000), who writes about the interdependent production of knowledge and social spaces. The lines of the assemblage, we argue in this paper, can be seen as ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of knowing early childhood. Research, in this context, is an act of constant (re)positioning, (re)aligning, and (re)creating however preliminary and transient understandings. There is nothing static about these processes, and the positions 'taken' cannot be fixed. Rather, the analogy is one of navigating the spatial dimensions of the assemblage, exposing the intentionality of research to the possibilities of unintentional drift. Beyond certainty lies 'untested feasibility' (Freire, 2004, p. 3) and the utopian possibility of spaces that are *not*, yet (οὐ τόπος).

Three vantage points emerge for our critical investigation of the early childhood (policy and practice) space-assemblage. First, the mapping of the 'territory' of the European early childhood policy assemblage. What are the characteristics of the historical, political, economic, and cultural 'space' we call Europe? Any attempt to arrive at a definite 'answer' to this question would, of course, be a vain undertaking. Even an exercise in compartmentalisation (e.g., to exclusively look at early childhood education and care policies and to disregard the wider sociohistoric-cultural-ideological hodgepodge of 21st century Europe in which they unfold) would be largely meaningless. This is not to say it has not been done. There are numerous examples for this approach, and they are held in high regard as they produce the kind of league tables (e.g., UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2008) and comparative overviews (e.g., OECD, 2001, 2006) that form the indispensable foundation for the

golden calf of educational and other regimes of ‘small “n” neo-liberalism’: ‘evidence-based’ policies (to which we will have to return later in our analysis). Only a quick caveat at this point, as co-author Mathias Urban has discussed in more detail elsewhere (e.g., Urban & Dalli, 2011): ‘comparison’, as Robert Stake (2003) reminds us, ‘is a grand epistemological strategy, a powerful conceptual mechanism’ (p. 148). The problem with this grand and powerful strategy is, he argues, that it necessarily and systematically obscures any knowledge that fails to facilitate comparison. Complexity, the ‘thick of things’, is not only lost, it becomes fundamentally threatening as it undermines the imposing edifices constructed from comparative data. Instead, ‘comparability’ has to be constructed, proactively, by systematically eradicating from the picture anything that is juicy, contradictory, puzzling, alive – in short, meaningful. It has to be mentioned that, unlike policy makers that see comparative data as a basic commodity, comparative educational researchers have long been aware of the simplification trap. Tobin and others remove the comparative ‘inter’ from their conceptual framework and argue for negotiation as a process of meaning-making instead (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). Alexander (2001) urges us to ‘bite the methodological bullet and progress beyond policy and structure to the classroom’ (p. 3).

‘Mapping’ the assemblage and its lines, as a research strategy, is fundamentally different to any attempt to arrange them in neat patterns. It is an exercise that resembles the practices of 15th century discovery and wonder more than it does the 19th and 20th century practices of counting and measuring. It is not without contradictions in itself – which is important, we argue, as in *mismatch*, *disagreement*, and *misunderstanding* lies the possibility of dialogue and transformation. Knowledge-space cartographer David Turnbull (2000) reminds us of the problematic nature – and the irony – of scientific discovery as he writes:

Columbus, for example, is said to have ‘discovered America’, despite the fact that there were American Indians already living there, despite strong evidence that the Basques and the Vikings had settlements there centuries before, and despite the fact that Columbus himself believed that he had found China. Clearly then, ‘the discovery of America’ is not a straightforward factual matter. It depends on who makes the claim and what sort of evidence they provide to whom in what circumstances—in other words ‘discovery’ is a retrospective social attribution. For the attribution to have been persuasive, Columbus or his representative had to return to Europe; indeed he had to return with evidence. More importantly, he had to come back with sufficient information to enable



himself and others to do it again. The evidence would typically be in the form of documents and maps which would allow the information to be recorded and integrated with previous knowledge. It is this documentary character of scientific discovery that is taken to be one of the significant differences between Western science and Pacific navigation. (p. 144)

Like explorers on their travels to a 'new' world, we set out on a 'discovery' of early childhood policies and practices. Like them, we assume that we know there is something out there: young children and adults, and what Siegfried Bernfeld (1973) calls the 'sum total of the social reaction to the fact of ontogenetic postnatal development' (p. 44) – education, more specific early childhood education and care for the purposes of this paper. The territory, we acknowledge, is teeming with all sorts of peoples and tribes, although we should be careful not to repeat Columbus' error of premature certainty and label them according to our biased expectations: the *child*, the *teacher*, the *parent*, the *policy maker*. The Chinese and Indians may well turn out to be Choctaw, Chinook, and Cherokee. Moreover, as the descendants of those who 'explored' the great *terra australis incognita* are only now, after 250 years, beginning to acknowledge, the inhabitants of the land cannot be subsumed under one unifying characteristic. For example, that they don't speak *our* language should not be our first concern. They speak (spoke – as was the case in Australia) 250 languages whose even most basic vocabulary we may well fail to comprehend. As with other 'discoveries', we are not the first to set foot into our imagined China. Others have done so before but, unlike America, they left their marks visible to all. The early childhood territory has long been divided into camps and settlements. There are gated communities, walled gardens, and, worryingly, mighty fortresses protected by walls of certainty. They are well connected by roads, drawing straight lines of causality from A to B. As Alexander (2000) writes:

Explanations [tend] to be monocausal and linear, and to jump incautiously from correlation to causality. Thus, with international league tables of both economic and educational performance now conveniently available, it was assumed that a country's position on one was determined by its position on the other. . . . The solution was clear: adopt strategies that would raise the average test scores of British children, and Britain's economic future would be assured. (p. 41)

By researching the assemblage through being and becoming an assemblage ourselves, we don't take the motorway of certainty. We deliberately, purposefully choose

to ignore readily available maps and omnipresent road signs. Instead, we veer off into areas of the territory where all the maps can tell us is *hic sunt leones*. In this deliberate act of veering off, of swerving across the territory, from the English Steiner (un)informed teacher to the 'n'eoliberal entrepreneurial child; from the salvation narratives dreamt up in the 'corridors of power' of EU policy making to the 'N'eoliberal commodification of early childhood education, locally and globally, lies the necessity and possibility of repositioning ourselves in relation to the actors and their relationships, and to the possible utopian counternarratives that might emerge.

## Muddling in the Middle

As noted above co-author Jayne Osgood currently finds herself in the thick of things. She writes: 'I find myself co-opted into a movement, which claims to represent a challenge to dominant ideas about early childhood education and care as produced through policy, and implemented in settings through curriculum directives' (personal communication to co-author Liz Jones). 'Co-option' implies being in the middle of things. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) note that 'it is never the beginning or the end that are interesting; the beginning and end are just points. What is *interesting* is *the middle*' (p. 20, emphasis added). They argue that to get to the interesting middle we have to abandon how we conventionally think. Instead of trees as our model of



thinking, we should have grass. Why grass? Because, 'not only does grass grow in the middle . . . grass has a line of flight and does not take root' (p. 39). Grass, Deleuze and Guattari continue, 'is the only way out'. Grass and other rhizomatic plants such as weeds 'exist only to fill the waste spaces left by cultivated areas', growing '*between*, among other things' (p. 20, emphasis added). However whilst we might favour the rhizomatic qualities of grass, it would seem that the 'growth' or indeed the 'blossoming' of children as understood within the frame of Early Childhood Action (ECA) seems to favour more linear and universal accounts.

As Jayne Osgood continues: 'Early Childhood Action comprises an eclectic array of academics, commentators (polemicists?), practitioners and parents. The unifying issue is the preservation of childhood – but that clearly means very different things' (personal communication to Liz Jones). Already we can detect interesting reservations on Jayne's part where she shifts from the personal pronoun to a degree of disengaging. She does not for instance claim 'we' as in 'we are an eclectic array of academics'. Nor with the insertion of 'polemicists' is she aligning herself with 'the unifying issue'. This, so Jayne continues, is based on psychotherapeutic concerns to preserve the innocence of childhood. Besides evoking 'childhood innocence' as something to fight for, Early Childhood Action also draws upon 'Montessori/Steiner informed commentators . . . [ECA members] connect the work of these European pioneers to the "intrinsic child" that is left to grow . . . [and] will blossom' (personal communication from Jayne Osgood to Liz Jones).

The notion of 'too much too soon' – a feature that for many is embedded in government policy – is a central concern within Early Childhood Action. A centralised curriculum that is concerned with the advancement and development of literacy and numeracy practices runs counter to the idea of the 'gradual blossoming' of the child. 'Too much too soon' is also the title of a 2011 book that is edited by Richard House, one of the foremost campaigners of ECA. Indeed ECA sits on a previous body, Open Eye, that was inaugurated when the English Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (EYFS) first became law. Open Eye argued that the curriculum content was predicated on the wrong sorts of foundations, that the literacy targets that were espoused within EYFSC were imposed on children that were too young, that they were politically driven rather than being informed by research, and that such targets were incommensurate with children's developmental paths. In brief, EYFSC was 'like building a house by starting with the roof and working downwards before laying proper foundations. It was too much too young, with too little play, and it eroded childhood'.<sup>1</sup> As part of Open Eye's campaign against the government's curriculum developments, Richard House (2011) drew upon a number of commentators to write

chapters for his book *Too Much Too Soon*. In the preface, Steve Biddulph (2011) writes:

If the adults around a child are responsive calm and loving, and the environment is safe and stimulus-rich then a child will grow of themselves in cognitive, language and emotional domains. Any attempt to force structure actually backfires. *It's like ripping open a rosebud to try to get it to blossom. The results are not good.* (I often suspect that if we had a government programme to teach children to speak, we would create stammerers and mutes; and if we had a programme to teach them to walk, we would create cripples). (p. xvi, emphasis added)

Turning back to ECA, its manifesto begins with 'the recognition that free imaginative play should be at the centre of young children's experience and learning' (Early Childhood Action, n.d.). The manifesto also calls for early years settings to be 'free of all commercial interference, whether marketing is directly or indirectly targeted at children and those who care for them'. It is important to note that another driving force behind ECA is Sue Palmer, who wrote *Toxic Childhood* (2006). According to the *London Evening Standard* (2008), this book 'took the lid off national angst over



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modern influences on children. The title has become shorthand for everything that's wrong with children's lives, from excessive testing at school to violent computer games, sex, drugs and alcohol'.

As Jayne Osgood highlights, there is an interesting alignment of Montessori philosophy with contemporary thinking that sees play as central to children's learning and children as being in need of safeguarding where pollution rules will keep toxic elements of the environment at bay.

Supposing I said there was a planet without schools or teachers, where study was unknown, and yet the inhabitants – doing nothing but living and walking about – came to know all things, to carry in their minds the whole of learning; would you not think I was romancing? Well, just this, which seems so fanciful as to be nothing but the invention of a fertile imagination, is a reality. . . . [The young child] learns everything without knowing he is learning it, and in doing so passes little by little from the unconscious to the conscious, treading always in the paths of joy and love. (Friends of Montessori, n.d.)

Indeed the influence of Montessori is particularly prevalent within ECA, where another of its founders, Kim Simpson, was voted 'Montessorian of the Year' (2006–2007). We can get a flavour of her Montessorian disposition towards children's development where she foregrounds children's spirituality over their materiality. Simpson (2011) writes:

There is already a prevailing mindset which sees the disadvantaged child as being limited, because they are viewed materialistically rather than spiritually. . . . If we view all children as full of potential we are more likely to ignore their economic or social status and have the highest expectations for their future, providing healthy soil for their potential, and offering the extra encouragement and respect so essential for positive attitudes towards learning. If we believe in them, then they will believe in themselves. . . . Without a spiritual view of life, we are missing the bigger picture, and therefore denying children their own spiritual birthright – the right to a fully functioning well-rounded personality with the soul intact and the inherent goodness unquestioned. (pp. 147–159).

And whilst there is an aspect of this philosophy that resonates with the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, there is nevertheless something problematic about the valorisation of spirituality over materiality. Turning back to Jayne Osgood, she writes:

*After this [i.e., reading Kim Simpson], I turned to a chapter by Hillevi Lenz Taguchi – I was interested to see how/where a contribution by a feminist poststructuralist might sit and with what affects. I was familiar with/sympathetic to the concepts and argument she offers and curious to see how she grapples with social categories/inequalities (class, gender, race) when applying materialist theories to understanding early childhood learning, which appears to be something she grapples with more fully in other publications. But Lenz Taguchi does state:*

In a relational materialist approach, we understand that gender, race and culture are part of a multiplicity in the process of becoming continuously *anew* in each new encounter [...]. This does not mean that gender and race, for example, are not important in the process of learning and becoming. Quite the contrary, it means that we cannot continue to understand diversities in terms of what an individual *represents* in terms of group category of, for example gender or race (Todd, 2009). Rather we need to look at the singularity in each becoming, and how gender or race, or both matter *differently* in different events for different children. (Lenz Taguchi, as cited in House, 2011, p. 222)

The question of whether class, gender, and race matters, including mattering differently, establishes another line within the assemblage where such variables are elided to the point of disappearing within universalized notions of the child, whether that be the 'spiritual child', the 'intrinsic child', and or the 'blossoming' child. Deleuze and Guatarri (2004) might well suggest that Early Childhood Action, in its desire to reconceptualise an alternative, has become ensnared within the 'universal method' (p. 418). Here, the 'good/blossoming/spiritual' child, one moreover with 'their soul intact', gestures towards 'a dominant and all encompassing fascism, or into a sect and a folklore, a microfascism . . . a "phantasy" that reactivates all the fascisms in a different way' (p. 418). ECA could be understood as a quest imbued with nostalgia, which besides being a form of political conservatism is also a deterrent to serious analysis of contemporary culture (Braidotti, 2002).

Difference, including differences in class, race, gender, nationality, or culture, is so complex and complicated within the uneven territory of postmodernity. As Braidotti (2002) highlights,

One of the most significant effects of late postmodernity in Europe is the phenomenon of trans-culturality, or cultures clashing in a pluri-ethnic or multicultural European social space. World-migration – a huge movement of population from periphery to centre, working on a world-wide scale of

‘scattered hegemonies’ (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994) – has challenged the claim to the alleged cultural homogeneity of European nation-states and of the incipient European Union. (p. 14)

Braidotti further remarks:

Present day Europe is struggling with multiculturalism at a time of increasing racism and xenophobia. The paradoxes, power dissymmetries and fragmentations of the present historical context rather require that we shift the political debate from the issue of differences between cultures to differences *within* the same culture. In other words, one of the features of our present historical condition is the shifting grounds on which periphery and centre confront each other, with a new level of complexity which defies dualistic or oppositional thinking. (p. 14)

## (Re)aligning

A question emerges: What are the alternatives if we reject ‘thought . . . that aspires to universality’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004, p. 418)? As a way of contesting this image of thought, Deleuze and Guattari (2004) offer nomadic thought which neither ‘allies itself with a universal thinking subject’ nor does it ‘ground itself in an all-encompassing totality’ (p. 418). They note that whilst nomads follow customary paths, going from one point to another, nomads also register and are hypersensitive to the ‘consequences’ between the points. In brief, ‘the life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*’ (p. 419).

Deleuze and Guattari (2004) urge us to think of the spaces inhabited by nomads, that is the steppes, deserts, and seas. In these spaces, landmarks are in continuous variation where

there is no line separating earth and sky; there is no intermediate distance, no perspective or contour; visibility is limited; and yet there is an extraordinary fine topology that relies not on points or objects but rather on haecceities, on sets of relations (wind, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand or the creaking of ice, the tactile qualities of both). (p. 421)

In contrast to this shifting fluid space are the state spaces. These are striated with walls, enclosures, and sedentary roads that ‘*parcel out a closed space to people*, assigning each person a share and regulating the communication between shares’ (p. 420).

Whilst it is relatively straightforward to appreciate the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum as a state-evolved striated space (the polis) where as a sedentary road it parcels out 'learning' in developmental stages consummate with ages and so both producing and ensuring the known, normative, and universal child, it is less tangible defining the space that is occupied by ECA. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) offer us 'migrants' (p. 420). Understood as migrants, we can appreciate ECA as a movement that wants to leave behind a milieu that is hostile towards children. Yet what does ECA's movement produce? Effectively doesn't it move only to arrive at a fixed and universal notion of the child? In wanting to educate children within spaces that are boxed in, bounded, and thus free from toxic commercialism, doesn't this prevent early years settings from being dialogical and democratic spaces where children and adults argue, debate, talk, and deal with some of the tensions that surrounds *matter*, including that which in some eyes is *matter out of place* (see Jones, MacLure, Holmes, & MacRae, 2012; MacLure, Jones, Holmes, & MacRae, 2012). Haggerty and Ericson (2000) make the point that the surface stability of any entity is a chimera and that once disturbed you encounter a 'host of different phenomena and processes working in concert. The radical nature of this vision becomes more apparent when one realizes how any particular assemblage is itself composed of different discrete assemblages which are themselves multiple' (p. 608). Jayne Osgood, for example moved from the notions of nomad and migrant to Avtar Brah's work (2012). However her move wasn't made in terms of a linear connection but was more because of some 'intensity' that circulated between 'nomad' and between Brah's work. Jayne notes,

I have been re-engaging with Avtar Brah's (2012) work – by looking back at the seminal piece 'The Scent of Memory' . . . anyway the following jumped out at me in relation to ECA and its place in the wider EC community and the theoretical belongings/becomings as nomadic homes. . . . Brah (2012) writes, 'One of the many creoles spoken on the South Asian subcontinent is Urdu which makes a distinction between 'ajnabi' and 'ghair'. An 'ajnabi' is a stranger; a newcomer whom one does not yet know but who holds the promise of friendship, love, intimacy. The 'ajnabi' may have different ways of doing things but is not alien. She could be(come) 'apna'; that is 'one of our own'. The idea of 'ghair' is much more difficult to translate for its point of departure is intimacy, it walks the tightrope between insider/outsider. . . . The world is full of ajnabis. There are feminists for instance, whom I may never meet, they are 'ajnabi' but not 'ghair' because they are part of an imagined community' (Brah, 2012,



p. 285). [Jayne then asks:] Does ‘ajnabi’ capture something of ECA as an imagined community – the potential to belong whilst recognising difference – shared interest in childhood – but done differently – with particular affects? (personal communication to Liz Jones)

By moving between different spaces, the space of theory and of practice as well as the lived experiences of ‘becoming’, including ‘becoming early years education’, Jane is trying to avoid as well as overcome the pitfalls of polarities so as to rethink early years education as molecular with a capacity to interact and intra-act with children and their families in rhizomatic ways and thus avoid an education predicated on linear notions of growth and development.

## Realigning

As researchers in the assemblage, we are not passive bystanders, gathering data from a world we pretend not to be involved in. Nor can we pretend, in any way, to exert methodological control over the interactions and relationships we study. Instead, working off ‘nomad’, further images such as ‘the itinerant’, ‘the Traveller’, and the vagabond come to mind. Fernand Deligny, writing in 1946 about his work with traumatised children in postwar France (Deligny, 1970), introduces the notion of educators as *vagabonds efficaces* (effective vagabonds). Vagabonds can be effective in many ways, intended and unintended. Their very existence challenges the certainties of the settled community, its reactions reaching from stigmatisation and marginalisation to oppression and repeated attempts at extinction. For us, researchers embarking on our discovery, becoming *vagabonds efficaces* is an appealing image. Research, we argue, is about asking critical questions. It involves sympathetic non-compliance and is about subversive challenges to the mighty edifices of certainty that dominate the territory.

The inhabitants of the territory (the European early childhood knowledge-space) provide a second vantage point for a critical investigation of the assemblage. We are interested in the actors and their shifting and changing relationships. We identify them in various locations of the territory. They are based at local (e.g., the individual practitioner), national or regional (e.g., initiatives such as the English Early Childhood Action and national governments), and transnational level (e.g., the European Commission and international organisations such as OECD and the World Bank). The various possible foci on these actors reflect the composition of the knowledge-scape as well as the composition of our research assemblage (Liz, Jayne, Rachel,

Maggie, and Mathias). What we are interested in are the relationships among these actors and their mutual or unilateral influences on each other's thinking and acting.

A starting point for our critical consideration is the existence and agency of the assemblage itself. By that we mean that local, individual practices are no longer imaginable without an immediate reference to global 'travelling discourses' (Bal, 2002; Ozga & Jones, 2006). International organisations such as OECD now directly impact national policies and practices, not only through providing comparative data ('We compare how different countries' school systems are readying their young people for modern life')<sup>2</sup> but by actively promoting *specific* standardised approaches across its member countries: "The quality toolbox is intended to present "practical solutions" for anyone with a role to play in encouraging quality in ECEC" (OECD, 2012, p. 15). In a similar way, the European Commission, cross-referring to the OECD, develops cross-national early childhood documents aimed at changing national and local practices in order to provide 'all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow' (European Commission, 2011). Cross-national and international policy influence on national and local early childhood practices is by no means a one-way, top-down process as the specific practices suggested (e.g., by the European Commission) derive from local examples of 'effective', 'best' early childhood practices. Lines of the assemblage also include local individual and collective practices referring to histories, practices, and philosophies rooted in distant parts of the 'territory', the European and global early childhood knowledge-space. We ask: What are the images and imaginations of young children – or, worryingly, *the* young child – that are conveyed in this particular travelling discourse? Which image of young children informs the analysis provided in high-level European policy documents that construct an almost immediate, quasicausal link between narratives of global/European crisis and salvation by/through/for young children and societal institutions set up for their education and care? The crisis is manifest in the preface to the current overall social and economic strategy of the European Union, *Europe 2020. A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*:

Europe faces a moment of transformation. The crisis has wiped out years of economic and social progress and exposed structural weaknesses in Europe's economy. In the meantime, the world is moving fast and long-term challenges – globalisation, pressure on resources, ageing – intensify. The EU must now take charge of its future. (European Commission, 2010)

Drawing directly on the bleak analysis of the 2020 strategy, a second document, *Council Conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the Social Dimension of Education and*

*Training*, indicates solutions: European crises on a global scale can be addressed not least by increasing participation in early childhood education and care, mainly of those children and families from 'a disadvantaged background' (Council of the European Union, 2010). Targeting poor children (instead of structural inequality, poverty, and distribution of wealth and resources in society) is a common figure in the neoliberal narrative, and it is hardly surprising to find the argument in a European Union policy document. What is interesting in this particular case is the shift of addressees and the underlying salvation narrative. Not only young children from 'disadvantaged backgrounds', but the entire political and economic union will benefit from early childhood education and, eventually, overcome the crisis: 'Only by addressing the needs of those at risk of social exclusion can the objectives of the Strategic Framework be properly met' (Council of the European Union, 2010, p. 4).

The double-image of the child as victim (at risk, disadvantaged, etc.) and saviour appears to be inherent in the assemblage, as co-author Jayne Osgood shows in her critical exploration of motives brought forward by the English Early Childhood Action initiative. Different lines of the assemblage, 'Neoliberal economisation, transnational governance, and local positionings in a continuum of governmentality come together in an unlikely configuration. How can we understand, for instance, a local initiative such as ECA as a form of resistance, aiming at reclaiming supposedly lost aspects of childhood, as a private actor defending the public good in resistance to a (public) government acting out of a neoliberal market logic? How did a 19th century German/Austrian white supremacist, whose writings have only just, in 2007, escaped the ban by German official censors for being racist, become a beacon of resistance against inappropriate government demands on young children ('too much, too soon') for early childhood educators in many English-speaking countries? Rudolf Steiner (1988) once argued: 'Negroes [sic] are like plants, exposure to the sun causes carbon particles to accumulate under their skin (hence black) and their essentiality [Ich-Wesenheit] has never been properly developed' (p. 292). How does this fit into an imagery of the child that has to be protected in order to 'grow' and 'blossom' – one of ECA's key arguments?

There are no straight answers to these questions, and we don't assume 21st century 'Steiner' teachers to be inherently racist. We do identify, however, a blurring of boundaries between actors, ideas, and ideologies and a hybridity of roles emerging in new policy and practice configurations and 'complex relations of reciprocal interdependence' (Jessop, 2002, p. 52, as cited in Ball, 2012). In the European early childhood assemblage, we agree with Ball (2012) that 'the boundaries between state, economy and civil society *are* being blurred; there *are* new voices within policy

conversations and new conduits through which policy discourses enter policy thinking' (p. 9). Finally, the third vantage point for a critical exploration of European (and other) early childhood assemblages lies in the utopian dimension of research. Real (as in being efficacious in the sense of Deligny) but untested (Freire, 2004), our research (any research) inevitably involves 'telling the story' from our perspective(s). We, like others we encounter in the assemblage, are not mere scribes. We have a voice – and one that is more likely to be heard than that of some other actors. The possibility of renarrativisation through (re)aligning lines of the assemblage is an option and a responsibility: What will our contribution to the narrative be? Can we, for instance, (de)align the utopian untested feasibility from the nostalgic narrative of loss (lost childhood . . .) as the 'preferred figure for the future' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. 5)? Can we contribute to writing and telling a narrative that involves dialogic 'creating of understandings' (Schwandt, 2004) rather than providing hegemonic 'evidence'?

## De-and Re-territorialisation . . .

Early Childhood Action has now published its alternative to the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum (Early Childhood Action, 2012). Its title, *Unhurried Pathways*, gestures towards its underpinning philosophy where attempts are made to escape the 'stages and ages' mentality that circulates in and around early years education. Writing can often be a painful process, but writing a document that seeks to capture multiple views is always going to be problematic. As Jayne mentions in one of her e-mail communications, 'to get to the point [of publication] has been painful to say the least, a pain caused in part by political and philosophical differences amongst the membership of ECA'. We would like to suggest, however, that pain, as understood as an affect or intensity, is a 'force'. Corrupting, but with good intentions, the words of Tomkins (1995), we could say that the Early Years Foundations Stage Curriculum is like a cut in a hand. If we cut our hand but we did not have pain receptors, only the blood from the cut would indicate that we needed to do something. Without the pain receptors, we do not have a sense of urgency. As Tomkins notes, 'the pain mechanism, like the affect mechanism, so amplifies our awareness of the injury which activates it that we are forced to be concerned, and concerned immediately' (p. 88).

## Notes

1. See the Save Childhood Movement's Web page on the *Too Much, Too Soon?* book at <http://www.savechildhood.net/too-much-too-soon.html>
2. See the 'Our Mission' page on the OECD website at <http://www.oecd.org/about/>

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